World Chronicle

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DISARMAMENT AFFAIRS

One of the most important themes in the world today is disarmament. From weapons of mass destruction to small arms, the United Nations' Department for Disarmament Affairs is leading global discussions relating to multilateral negotiations on arms limitation, conventional arms, monitoring, databases and information, and regional disarmament. In this episode of **World Chronicle**, Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, from the UN's Department for Disarmament Affairs, talks about important issues related to peace and security around the world.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

With the end of the Cold War, nations have come to recognize their stake in the success of multilateral negotiations and the monitoring of weapons development. As a consequence, the United Nations has taken centre stage in the worldwide effort to limit both weapons and conflict. The United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs has been on the forefront of the struggle for reducing the availability of conventional and non-conventional weapons around the globe.

Our guest today is a world expert on disarmament issues. He is Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the United Nations' Department for Disarmament Affairs. Joining me to talk with Mr. Dhanapala are James Wurst of *In These Times* and Joe Lauria of *The Boston Globe*.

Mr. Dhanapala, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

DHANAPALA: Thank you.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, it must have been a bit of a shock when the United States Senate decided not to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. What will the consequences be for the whole course of disarmament of this action which of course was linked very much to domestic politics? The charge was that the Republican majority wanted to humiliate President Clinton, but that aside, the worldwide repercussions has been quite considerable. Do you like to talk about it a bit?

DHANAPALA: Well, the Senate action was a deep disappointment and it was a major setback in the progress towards nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation – the Secretary-General so described it. It happened at the time when the other ratifying states and signatory states of the CTBT have just met in Vienna from the sixth to the eighth of October of this year and they had reiterated the importance of the Treaty and called on all countries to help the Treaty enter into force. Now the United States had taken the leadership role in the negotiating and the signature of the Treaty. In fact, President Clinton was the first to sign the Treaty in 1996 and so it was an irony that the US Senate should reject the ratification for reasons that were not entirely clear. But the goods news, of course, is that the Administration have reiterated their desire to continue the fight for ratification. We know that

this issue will be in the presidential campaign and with over 80 percent of the US electorate in favour of the CTBT, I'm optimistic that eventually the United States will ratify this Treaty. The immediate impact will be a negative one. We are going to see a deceleration of the process regarding the signature and the ratification. Many countries will not feel the same pressure to sign it. If the United States had shown the leadership and ratified the Treaty, there would have been a great encouragement to other nations to also sign and ratify the Treaty. And so, we would have seen the entry into force much sooner than we will now.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is it a serious blow for disarmament per se? I mean are we likely to head into another round of arms accumulation, another arms race?

DHANAPALA: It is because the arguments that were made on the Hill for not signing the CTBT are arguments that will reverberate elsewhere. It's going to have an impact on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which comes up for review in the year 2000 in April. Now in 1995 when this Treaty was extended indefinitely and I happened to preside over that conference, one of the reasons why countries found it possible to extend the Treaty indefinitely was because there was a certainty of a CTBT being signed and the CTBT had been a long cherished goal of the disarmament community because it was going to be a break on nuclear proliferation horizontally as well as the development of nuclear weapons. So when this promise has now been betrayed there will be great difficulty amongst the NPT Treaty Parties with regard to the continuation of the Treaty and we are going to see that frustration ....

LITTLEJOHNS: What effect does this likely to have on the situation in the sub-continent where you have both India and Pakistan who are now nuclear powers and they have so far not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Is this likely to encourage other states to become nuclear powers?

DHANAPALA: Well, we have 155 countries who have already signed on to the Treaty. The only three countries who are required to sign and ratify the Treaty in order for it to enter into force and who have not signed are the DPRK North Korea, India and Pakistan. Now as far as India and Pakistan are concerned, we have already have promises from their leadership that they will sign it. I believe they will fulfill those promises but they may wait awhile until United States ratifies the Treaty before they ratify it. And this is entirely understandable given the action of the Senate. So this is certainly one of the impacts that the Senate action will have on South Asia.

WURST: I'd like to get back to the Non-Proliferation Treaty comments you were making. First of all this, as you said, you mentioned you presided over the '95 review conference and one of the onus that you stressed very strongly was that a perpetual system of accountability that the nuclear weapon states would have to account for their actions in the fulfilment of their obligations and then a treaty which also includes obligation to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Now given everything that Michael and you have just been talking about, is there any way to solve it, any sense of accountability or even viability of the Non-Proliferation Treaty after next year's conference?

DHANAPALA: Well, between 1995 and the year 2000, it is certainly true that we have not an impressive record as far as nuclear disarmament is concerned. In the conference on disarmament, we were able to negotiate the CTBT, it has not entered into force for reasons that we just discussed. We have also not began the negotiation of a Fissile Material Treaty which is another goal set out in the principles and objectives decision which was adopted in 1995. And, as I said, nuclear disarmament has been conspicuous by its absence. Start II has not yet been ratified by the Russian Duma and we have not began negotiating Start III Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States. So we will need to have some major development between now and April of the year 2000 for the NPT treaty parties to feel any sense of confidence that the undertakings given in 1995 are being fulfilled. One possibility is the adoption of a programme of work in the conference on disarmament which will include the establishment of a subsidiary body to discuss if not negotiate the subject of nuclear disarmament and that has been resisted in the past by some delegations. If there is a concession made there, I believe this will help to make the atmosphere in April 2000 much more conducive for a successful review conference.

LAURIA: Ambassador Dhanapala, I wanted to shift the focus to small arms but before before I do, a quick question about what Michael is talking about. Within a couple of days of each other, Pakistan military took over the government and the Senate rejected the NPT. Are you concerned at all that the military takeover will heighten the danger of resumption of testing by either India or Pakistan?

DHANAPALA: Well, as somebody who believe strongly in democracy, I do believe that nuclear weapons should be, if at all, in the hands of civilian democratically elected governments. However, I am confident that the present army rulers in Pakistan will act responsively and that they will fulfill the promises that was made in their opening

statements regarding a nuclear restraint. They have shown it with regard to conventional war, they have withdrawn some of their forces from their border and I can only hope that on the nuclear issue, they will also show the same sense of restraint.

LAURIA: On the small arms, the UN has been saying quite a lot recently which might appear to be maybe not more than a, in the end in spite his intentions, unfortunately good public relations. One of the – the conference coming up in 2001, the talk leading up to that one of the ideas is to create a international registry of arms dealers to identify smugglers and create an international database. I was wondering how likely that could possibly be when you may have to depend only on governments to voluntarily give that information. One US administration official told me, without being named, that he thought this approach was naive. He said that the UN is saying all the politically correct things about alleviating the plight of children in armed conflict but without independent research by the UN such a database will never be created and a bit cruelly perhaps he says the UN appear to be nothing more than senior – keeping senior level people and jobs flying around the world, attending meetings. Can you react to that and what is a lack of such a database really being created.

DHANAPALA: Well, let me say first and foremost that we have first of all to sensitize international public opinion. We have to help governments forge a political will necessary in order to enter into international agreements. This takes time. We have two ground breaking reports published by the United Nations through panels of experts. One in 1997 and another this year, in addition to several other reports that have come out of the Secretariat. Now all these goes hand in hand with efforts made by the Non-Governmental Organizations and there are a number of them working in this field. There is a federation of international governmental organizations network working on the subject of small arms and we are in close touch with them. In the United Nations, my Department has been designated as the focal point for action on small arms and we have formed a mechanism called CASA, the Coordinating Action on Small Arms, in which all departments and funds and programmes in the UN system dealing with the humanitarian, human rights, environmental development and other aspects of small arms issue meet regularly, collate information, plan strategies and help to work towards having common action. Now, in terms of having an agreement, the small arms issue is a very complex issue. It does not lend itself to an overnight band like the Ottawa Convention did with regard to small – to land mines. We need to recognize that small arms have legitimate uses. Law enforcement agencies use them, and many countries

use them for legitimate national defence purposes.

LAURIA: If I can interrupt – will you be able to create a register of arms dealer?

DHANAPALA: We are already talking about regional registers. We have a conventional arms register which is confined to seven categories of larger arms, not small arms. Eventually, it is possible for us to have a small arms register, once we have a marking system and once we have the cooperation of all governments.

LAURIA: You need the cooperation of all governments.

DHANAPALA: Absolutely. Now as far as information is concerned, the naivety that was referred to in your question will be reduced once we have the goodwill of governments and when we have Non-Gvernmental Organizations who support us with information and their research, and this is a very important component, because already citizens verification has become a poking component in this day and age of disarmament.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, Michael Douglas, the movie star, was involved in – as a UN messenger of peace – was involved in something in Albania, I believe, in connection with the destruction of small arms and you were instrumental in that. What was all that about?

DHANAPALA: Well it goes back to the year 1997 when in Albania there was a situation of civil unrest. The armoury of the government deposed, was raided and over 600,000 weapons were taken away. The Government of Albania approached the Secretary-General last year to device a programme to provide incentives in order that these arms could be recovered and I went on a evaluation mission in June of last year together with representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs and UNDP. And we suggested a weapons for development programme where we would have community-based development projects with a high labour-intensive component providing employment for the young people. In return for the voluntary surrender of weapons, we chose a district in the centre of Albania which had a high incidence of these arms that had been taken away and we have been very successful in this district. We've collected over 6,700 weapons and a hundred tons of ammunition in a period of a few months interrupted by the Kosovo crisis. There has been strong political commitment by the government and cooperation from opposition parties who happened to control the local district as well as NGO's schools and a number of other citizen bodies. S o what I did was in September of this year, I went for a ceremonial destruction of some of the

weapons as well of some of the development projects. Michael Douglas did so in October of 1999. And we are now planning to expand the programme to contiguous districts and we have been helped with financial support from the International Community, principally from the European Union.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World chronicle.** Our guest is Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the United Nations' Department for Disarmament Affairs.

WURST: I'd like to go back to some of the points that Joe was raising about the idea of the United Nations independently gathering data. For instance the register of conventional arms that you referred to only takes what governments choose to report and the UN just simply distributes it without comment. Now given that this country, let's choose Korea which is one of the countries that is opposed to the UN gathering data independently, as well as several other countries, I'm not saying we're not the one, but on such a sensitive issue as small arms where you got the opposition the UN independently gathering and opposition to Non-Governmental Organizations having more than a peripheral role when you got something as sensitive as small arms, how in the world can you do something effectively along these guidelines that Joe is talking about?

DHANAPALA: A lot of action has been taken both on the supply side and on the demand side. On the supply side, we have the European Unions joint action of December 1998 where they agree to voluntary restraints with regard to the export of arms. On the demand side we have countries ECOWAS in West Africa led by Mali calling for moratorium on the import of small arms. So there are already a number of building blocks towards this international consensus. Unless the United Nations is empowered to collect information independently, we cannot of course do so. But the information that a lot of countries are supplying, including the United States,for the conventional arms registry is an opportunity for us to have as much transparency as possible and therefore confidence building in this area. Now what the regional centre for peace and disarmament in Africa based in Lome's is doing and this a part of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, is to try to have sub-regional or regional registries and that's a small modest step towards having a global registry. I think in places where there is conflict, if we can begin to have this kind of registries, we must also then look at the question of surplus arms especially after the conflict situation. And if we can collect these arms as was done recently in Liberia and destroy them as has been done in Liberia, then we are beginning to take some of these surplus arms out of

circulation and we have an inventory of those arms that were destroyed. So with this little steps that we are taking, it's not possible in disarmament to take that giant step immediately towards the alleviation of a situation that is in fact causing enormous number of civilians that's mostly women and children.

WURST: But then you still come down to the problem of where the closer you get to doing anything substantive on small arms, the closer you get to countries' sense of need for self-defense or legal trade or legal possession. What happens when you get there cause you're already getting there in these debates on how far you should go beyond just dealing with illicit arms. I mean, what's going to happen when you hit that wall?

DHANAPALA: Well, this is where the first step is to have this problem of the illicit trafficking of small arms. There are links between the illicit trafficking and the legal trade and those links will be exposed at the conference and in the preparatory process towards that conference. We hope that out of that conference will come some commitments from governments to minimize the illicit trafficking of small arms. Once we have that problem contained, then we look into the question of the legal trade so that there can be certain restraints that are mutually acceptable both to the supplying countries and to the countries who import the arms and many of them import it for legitimate national security requirements and that is why we come to this sensitive area. Disarmament is linked inextricably with security and whether it is weapons of mass destruction held by the big powers of a treaty or small arms held by smaller countries, we must finally try to achieve global security at lower levels of arms.

LAURIA: Ambassador, I can give you a link between the legal and illegal. It is legal in the United States for an American citizen to be resident here to buy arms, let's say in South America or Europe, have them shipped by an independent broker outside of US territory to Africa, let's say to a conflict there, without the need of a government license by the US as long as he doesn't come into actual possession at any time of these weapons. Once they will often go to a country that has a legal and use the certificate they're allowed to import these arms but then they are transhipped to a country under arms embargo or UN arms embargo. Two part question: will there be need for legislative changes in national governments to take care of problems like this and what kind of policing mechanism can there be? Ambassador Fowler has even talked about AWACS going above the skies in Angola ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador of Canada.

LAURIA: Ambassador of Canada, excuse me .... Fowler who's the Head of the Angolan Committee says he would like to see AWACS perhaps patrolling the skies as this is illegally shipped on to some African country being illegally transhipped to UNIDA-controlled territory. Can the policing mechanism be established and is there a need to change our international laws – make it harder to ship.

DHANAPALA: It follows from any international treaty, if there is a treaty, that has to be consequential municipal legislation in individual nations stating all the implement those international treaty obligations and that will come in the United States before the Senate of course and has to be ratified by the Senate, hopefully. But that is only one aspect of the problem. The policing, I think what Ambassador Fowler of Canada was referring to was the enforcement of Security Council embargoes. And that's a different issue because it involves the enforcement of Security Council mandatory resolutions which I won't go into. We are talking now about an international treaty regarding small arms and the enforceability of that. Clearly we have to have some kind of mechanism to detect any non- compliance of that treaty and enforce that treaty. With all international treaties that affect international peace and security, any violation of that treaty eventually goes to the Security Council. So the enforceability is a matter then for the Security Council to ensure.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, we have not talked about chemical and biological weapons and not long ago, there was a lot of concern about the possibility of Iraq's making mischief with these weapons. How is that situation looking?

DHANAPALA: Well, the Iraq situation is – as you know it comes under the ambit of the Security Council. UNSCOM has not been able to go back into Iraq since the – UN Special Commission – has not been able to go back into Iraq since December 16 of 1998 nor has the IAEA and the future verification regime for Iraq both in terms of the nuclear weapon potential, the chemical weapons, the biological weapons and the missiles is all a subject to the negotiations that are still going on in the Security Council. But in general, as far as chemical weapons are concerned, the chemical weapons convention is enforced. We have the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons based in The Hague implementing it. And that implementation is very successful. Of course, the Treaty is not universal. We have to appeal to the International Community, those countries that have not signed and ratified the convention to do so as early as possible. On biological weapons, we

do have a convention again, but that is inadequate confidence that that convention can be verified or any violation of it can be detected. And right now in Geneva, there is a process going on, ad hoc group working on a protocol which will give teeth to that convention and have effective verification procedures.

WURST: One quick question on anti-ballistic missile defences – the ABM Treaty. Both China and Russia have been giving very angry speeches over the last several months about the possibility of deployment of ballistic missile defenses in other words ability to protect the country from a missile attack. Do you see a major stumbling block or even a treaty breaker if the ...

DHANAPALA: Well, we have the critical stage into relations amongst the great powers and here I refer not only to Russia and the United States who are parties to this Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 but also involving China and France, a country which has also expressed grave concerns about plans to amend the ABM. The ABM Treaty has been widely regarded as a cornerstone of strategic stability and that statement has been reiterated most recently on the 23rd of September when the foreign ministers of the permanent five members of the Security Council met in New York. So any amendments to that Treaty will begin to affect this strategic stability and it is also likely to affect the entire structure of agreements that exist between Russia and the United States and therefore it has to be approached very cautiously.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Dhanapala, we only have just a very few seconds left. Are you optimistic about disarmament given the state of the world? Yes? No? Maybe?

DHANAPALA: Well the immediate climate around us is not particularly conducive to having more agreements but in the future, in the long term I believe we should be optimistic and we can be optimistic.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Dhanapala, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle.** Our guest has been Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the United Nations' Department for Disarmament Affairs. He was interviewed by James Wurst of *In These Times* and Joe Lauria of *The Boston Globe*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

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